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Fragmented yet Associated: *Waqf* Activities in an Urban Hui Muslim Internet Community

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Abstract

This paper examines how Islamic revival has progressed in China since economic reform by focusing on the activities of an urban Hui Muslim Internet community in Yunnan province. Since the late 1970s, there have been two clear tendencies in Hui society. One is the rise in secularization amongst many Hui Muslims through social change; for example the dissolution of traditional Hui communities and intensified interaction between Hui and Han Chinese in daily life. Another is Islamization amongst certain Hui, brought about through a relaxation of religious policies. These contrasting trends mean that many Hui people do not share a sense of religiosity. Seemingly, they lack a point of contact. However, the Hui Muslim Internet community connects them through diverse activities and intents, from meeting prospective marriage partners to the doctrinal development of Islam. Additionally, Hui Muslims associated via the Web engage in Islamic revival movements such as establishing Waqf (Muslim endowments). This suggests a new comprehension of Islamic revival, one which does not reduce such movements to a sense of religiosity. As the new associations connect diverse Hui Muslims, the Islamic revival movements develop in entanglements of both the Islamic and the secular and not from mere Islamization alone.

Keywords: Islamic revival, internet, *Waqf* activities, Hui people, China

要旨

本論は、雲南省の都市部の回族ムスリムのインターネット・コミュニティの活動に焦点を当て、「改革・開放」以降の中国においてイスラーム復興がいかに進展してきたのかについて考察を行う。1970年代末以降、回族社会には2つの傾向がある。一つは、伝統的な回族コミュニティの解体や日常生活における回族と漢族の関係の深まりなどの社会変容による回族ムスリムの多くに見られる世俗化の進展である。もう一つは、宗教政策の緩和によりもたらされた回族の一部のイスラーム化である。これらの対照的な傾向は多くの回族たちがムスリムとしての宗教意識や生活様式を共有しないことを意味する。そのため、一見

すると彼らには日常生活において接点がないように見える。しかし、回族มุสลムのインターネット・コミュニティは、結婚相手探しやイスラームの発展などといった彼らの多様な意図を結びつけることにより、彼らの間に新たなつながりを創出する。さらに、ウェブを通じて結びついた回族มุสลムはワクフ(มุสลムの寄金)設立などのイスラーム復興運動を担っていく。こうした事例は、イスラーム復興を宗教意識へと還元しない新たな理解を示唆するものである。多様な回族มุสลムを結びつけるこうした新たなつながりとして、イスラーム復興運動は、単なるイスラーム化ではなく、イスラーム的なものと世俗的なものとの両方がもつれ合いを通して展開しているのである。

キーワード：イスラーム復興、 インターネット、 ワクフ活動、 回族、 中国

Introduction

As the Arab Spring movement of 2010 underscored, the influence of the Internet in formulating political collectives is increasingly growing. China is no exception. The number of Internet users has rapidly increased over the last ten years in China. For instance, the number of Internet users has jumped from 45.8 million in June 2002 (CNNIC 2002: 4) to 537.6 million in June 2012 (CNNIC 2012: 10). In other words, Internet users have increased more than tenfold over the last decade. The rapid spread of Internet use in China has influenced everything including, as in other regions of the globe, the religious sphere. For example, Muslims, with the notable exception of the Islamic clergy,¹ are increasingly able to gain easier access to religious knowledge² because of the spread of new media technologies.³ This started with the Internet, and then spread via CD, MP3 and so on. Such technological changes have enabled numerous Muslims to learn about Islam by themselves.⁴ Therefore such changes brought about a steep decline in the monopoly of Islamic knowledge from the clergy.⁵

The relationship between religion and media has recently received much attention in Islamic studies and religious studies in general (Meyer and Moors 2006).⁶ Turner argued urban Muslims became able to access “*fatwas* on the Internet which offer guidance on everything relating to Islamic banking, appropriate holiday destinations, diet, veiling, schooling and clothing” (Turner 2010: 19). Yagi (2011) also argued that the emergence of popular Internet usage facilitated access to religious information (such as *fatwa*, scriptures, and similar faith concerned materials). Moreover, she contended that this opened a new religious discursive space for Muslims beyond the

clergy. These important points made by Turner and Yagi should not be dismissed when the relationship between Islam and the Internet is discussed. However, these scholarly works tend to interpret the influence of the Internet on Islam as a mere facilitation of Islamic revival movements. Moreover, they are likely to support a popular inclination to simply reduce the character of Islamic revival movements only to Islam as a faith or belief system. Such a tendency is common with other works on contemporary Islamic revival (Mahmood 2005).

There is no doubt that Islamic revival has attracted attention beyond the Islamic world, especially since the late 1970s and the Iranian Islamic Revolution. In sum, Islamic studies have generally embraced a paradigm whereby Islamism is viewed as coincident with Western modernity.⁷ Alternatively, the perspective that Islam is incompatible with modernity,⁸ especially after the late 1970s, is emphasized.⁹ However, both tend to interpret Islamic revival movements assuming that Muslims were religiously awakened to their Muslim identities through an engagement with belief or faith. In other words, many researchers have been inclined to deduce that the essential character of Islamic revival movements comes from Islam or a sense of religion, as in the studies of religion and media cited above. For example, Nagata, who carried out fieldwork in Malaysia from the late 1970s to the early 1980s, argued that young Muslims who received higher education in institutions such as universities in urban areas were perceived to be ‘religiously defective’ due to the perceived influences of Malay culture that they encountered. In fact, through communication with their colleagues and schoolmates from Islamic states such as Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Libya, many actually became more ambitious to improve their knowledge of Islam. Moreover, this experience often intensified their identity as Muslim by underscoring that their faith has universal significance as against their Malay regional identity. Therefore, young urban Muslims participated in *Dakwah* movements, and went to rural areas to challenge the traditional religious authority of *ulama* who were influenced by non-Islamic indigenous Malay customs (Nagata 1982: 48-49). In the case of Chinese Muslims, Gillette’s 1990s research in Xi’an, focusing on the consumption patterns of Hui people, argues that Hui people challenge the evolutionism ideology of the CCP (Chinese Communist Party) which subordinates them to Han people, through using Islamization (or Arabization) as a marker (Gillette 2000). One of Gillette’s key ethnographic cases is the anti-alcohol movement. According to her, this movement was started through a call by some of the clergy who felt a sense of crisis because certain *halāl* restaurants (*Qingzhen Shitang*) were selling alcohol and young Muslims were drinking alcohol in a Muslim dominant district. Due to this situation Muslims in agreement with the clergy held study meetings

to improve Islamic knowledge, or to spread Islamic orthodoxy, and expanded anti-alcohol movements around the district (Gillette 2000: 167-191).

Thus, the dominant interpretation in previous literature has been a tendency to over-privilege doctrinal aspects of Islam in Islamic revival movements. Of course, many studies make key points in relation to the research of Islam in contemporary society overall and so ought not to be dismissed outright. According to Bayat, however, previous literature regarding Islamic revival movements greatly depended upon the dominant and totalizing discourses of Islamist leaders and so overlooked the fact that these movements “possess various layers of activism and constituency (leaders, cadres, members, sympathizers, free riders, and so on) who are likely to exhibit different perceptions about the aims and objectives of their activities” (Bayat 2005: 900). Thus, he proposed a more fluid and fragmented interpretation of Islamic revival movements. More to the point, he argued that social movements including Islamist movements were carried out by groups whose collectivity was ensured through “partially shared interests” (Bayat 2005: 901-902). These groups can be conceptualized as impromptu public collectives or assemblages. Moreover, since Bayat’s telling study a broader range of new religious interpreters has emerged, beyond *ulama* control, through the Internet. This is because the Internet forms “a continuum instead of a dichotomization between elite and mass, literate and folk” (Anderson 2003). These arguments are very important to consider when interpreting Islamic revival movements. Because Bayat and Anderson did not offer readers a concrete case, it is not entirely clear how partially shared interests, or such a continuum amongst diverse actors, develop. Or further, how such actors form collectives that develop into Islamic revival movements. It is necessary to examine these points in specific local contexts in order to reveal such characteristics of the Islamic revival movement.

Based on the above-mentioned research, this article will examine how Islamic revival movements have progressed in contemporary China by focusing on the actual activities of an urban Hui Muslim¹⁰ Internet community in Yunnan province, an area where Internet use has been rapidly spreading since the late 1990s. I will examine how heterogeneous actors (such as pious Muslims and secular Muslims), who do not share a sense of religiosity or contact in their everyday lives, are associated through daily mundane activities such as recreation, in the online Muslim community. These fragmented collectives have led to Islamic revival movements. In short, I will explain how Islamic revival has progressed without denying involvement of the secular in the process.

The following section will demonstrate how the Hui Muslim society has followed two simultaneous yet contrary trends since economic reform: Islamization and Hanization (that is to say, being assimilated into the everyday life of Han society), and how these social changes have brought about the fragmentation of Hui Muslim society. The third section of this article will describe the diversity of Hui Muslims; discussing those who do not share a sense of religiosity or lifestyle as Muslim yet remain partially associated through mundane and tangible secular activities such as hiking, meeting for dinner, sports activities and so on. Such meetings are often based on involvement in the Hui Internet community, and these partial or selective associations have led to Islamic revival movements such as offering aid and support to Hui living in deprived areas or helping out elderly Muslims in need. Subsequently, the last section will examine the process of how Islamic revival movements evolve in contemporary China. It will discuss the social effects of the Internet on movements related to the aforementioned two contrary tendencies of change in Hui Muslim society.

This article is based on fieldwork conducted in urban areas of Kunming, Yunnan province, China. Research was carried out from February 2008 to March 2010, and again from December 2010 to January 2011.¹¹ My research focuses on the Hui people.¹² Hui society, culture, and politics have been shaped through historical intermarriage between foreign Muslims, for example Arabs, Persians, and Turks who migrated to China from the Tang dynasty until the Yuan dynasty, and Chinese Han people who have converted to Islam (Gladney 1996: 16-21; De Angelis 1997: 151-155). There are about 140,000 Hui people in Kunming, which is about 2.3 percent of the total population (Kunming-shi Zongjiao Shiwu-ju and Kunming-shi Yisilan-jiao Xiehui (eds.) 2005: 11). There are six mosques and eighteen members of the clergy in urban Kunming. My fieldwork was carried out in the mosques and also conducted in informal spheres such as *halāl* restaurants, the offices of private companies, and similar non-official spaces. Taking into account that religion is one of many sensitive issues in China, the reader should note that I have opted to use pseudonyms for people and places in order to protect my informants.

1. Polarization in Hui Muslim society

Since economic reform, there have been two clear tendencies in Hui society. One is the rise in Hanization amongst many Hui Muslims through social change since the late 1970s. This shift has been brought about, for example, through the dissolution of traditional Hui communities and intensified relations between Hui and Han Chinese in

daily life. Another key driver of change has been the Islamization of part of Hui society through a relaxation of state religious policies. Recently, furthermore, the influence of Salafi religious discourse has become increasingly powerful. This section will give an overview of the two contrary tendencies of Hanization and Islamization in changing Hui Muslim society throughout the Post-Mao era in order to better understand ethnographic cases regarding the Hui Muslim Internet community in the sections following.

1.1. Hanization through the dissolution of the traditional Hui Muslim community

The Hui people have been formed through their historically deep relationship with Han people (De Angelis 1997: 152-155; Jones-Leaning and Pratt 2012: 309-328). The residential distribution of Hui people is commonly stated as “spread widely and concentrated narrowly” (*da fen can, xiao ji zhong* [*sic*]) (Gladney 1996: 27).¹³ This means Hui people live in separate but relatively densely populated urban areas, in contrast for example with the large but sparsely populated areas such as is common for Tibetan or Uighur communities. Hui are widely distributed all over China. Historically, they formed their communities around a mosque. Hui people have lived surrounded by a large majority of Han people for a very long time. They lost their original language and now Mandarin is their mother tongue. Furthermore, they were made to change their original names to Chinese names during the Ming dynasty. Given these points, the history of Hui people might be considered to be the history of Hanization and certainly a profound Han influence cannot be ignored.

However, Islamic beliefs are considered to distinguish Hui people from Han people and they have long been maintained as grounds for collective or community identity. It is considered that Hui people traditionally form communities centering on community politics and religion. Moreover, such collectives are thought to form an autonomous community from Han society, seen in conditions such as the enforcement of a penal system based on Islamic law by the clergy (Iwamura 1949: 16-18), comprising Islamic norms, while taking into account the dominance of non-Islamic states.¹⁴

Thus, the traditional Hui Muslim community has been adopted into the state governance system in modern China (De Angelis 1997: 158-163; Ashiwa and Wank 2009). The Hui community seriously suffered from the suppressive religious policies of the Anti-Rightist Campaign and the Great Cultural Revolution which accelerated Hanization amongst Hui Muslims (De Angelis 1997: 161; Jones-Leaning and Pratt 2012: 318).¹⁵ Moreover, Hanization is thought to have progressed even further since economic reform.

The interface between Hui and Han people had already increased at the local level through the construction of the People's Commune System (*Renmin Gongshe*) and then reform expanded more widely through rapid economic development and participation in the global economy following economic reform. Due to this situation, the subsequent changes in Hui society have attracted attention in Hui Muslim Studies, such as the decline in the proportion of Hui people living together around the mosque and a marked increase in shared living quarters between Hui people and Han people through various urban area developments, especially since the economic reforms were enforced (Ma and Jin 1997; Ma 2003; Liang 2006). Consequently, it is common for researchers to contend that the social structure of the Hui community has basically been dismantled (Zhou and Ma 2004). This social situation can be observed in Kunming. Although there were traditional Hui Muslim communities centered around mosques in urban areas of Kunming at least until the 1950s (Song 1985), after the 1950s urban development progressively dismantled the social structure of such communities, especially after the 1990s (Kunming-shi Zongjiao Shiwu-ju and Kunming-shi Yisilan-jiao Xiehui 2005: 150-152).¹⁶ Thus, the dissolution of traditional Hui communities increasingly estranged Hui people from mosque life and intensified the relations between Hui and Han in their everyday lives, especially in urban areas. For example, one can see such instances in the intermarriage between both Hui and Han. Consequently, it is commonly thought in Hui Muslim studies that the Hui people were Hanized (Hu 1997; Ma and Jin 1997: 29-30).¹⁷ In fact, many Hui Muslims abandoned Islamic practice in gaining employment or being educated outside of Islamic institutions. In this sense, such increasing commitment to mainstream society where Han people are dominant has also brought about secularization among Hui Muslims. For instance, Wang Xuan (a Hui female in her twenties), who works for a company in Kunming, continues to follow Islamic practices such as praying and wearing the *hijab* in her hometown located in a rural area with a concentrated population of Hui Muslims. However, she does not follow basic Islamic practices in Kunming. She explained the reason in the language of cause and effect: "...because if I wear a *hijab* (*Dai Gaitou*), I can not find a job".

Hui Muslim society faces a situation whereby the shift in relationships brought about by a wide variety of social changes has emerged in tandem with economic reform. In fact, Hui people must inexorably be in contact with the Han cultural others, with ideas of a secular society, and with complex economic conditions. Therefore, they are forced to live in a heterogeneous world; a world that contains cultural others or religious impurities. However, countering these realities that the Hui Muslims are living with, as discussed below, strict and comprehensive religious discourse, or Salafi religious discourse, simultaneously influences Hui Muslim society against diversification.

1.2. Islamic revival in the Post-Mao era and the influence of Salafi religious discourse

A rapid revival of religion has occurred through relaxation of CCP religious policies since the late 1970s. This is a noticeable reaction to the Great Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) in which religion was suppressed. The policies of reform and opening called *Gaige Kaifang* introduced by Deng Xiaoping in December 1978 included a relaxation of restriction on religious practice. The CCP's theory and approach toward religion was formalized in a 1982 CCP directive called *On the Basic Viewpoint and Policy on the Religious Question during Our Country's Socialist Period (Document 19)* (Ashiwa and Wank 2009: 10-11). Religious liberty was recovered, though it still functioned within conditions controlled by the government.¹⁸ This situation is also true of Kunming. For example, mosque real estate that was requisitioned by the government during the Great Cultural Revolution began to be returned to religious groups. This has been the case in Kunming since 1983. Moreover, the government offered funds for rebuilding and/or repairing mosques (Kunming-shi Zongjiao Shiwu-ju and Kunming Yisilan-jiao Xiehui 2005: 136-138). Such religious liberty has been basically maintained for about thirty years.¹⁹

This transition in religious policy became a primary factor that brought about a revival in religion. Statistically speaking, the number of authorized mosques and clergymen in Kunming have increased from forty places and eighty persons respectively in 1989 (Kunming-shi Renmin Zhengfu (ed.) 1990: 108), to 133 places and 183 persons respectively in 2007 (Kunming-shi Renmin Zhengfu (ed.) 2008: 167). This illustrates one element of religious revival in China. Moreover, the number of pilgrims to Mecca has been rapidly increasing every year since 1989. Pilgrims to Mecca in Kunming increased from a mere two in 1989 (Kunming-shi Renmin Zhengfu (ed.) 1990: 108) to 113 in 2009.²⁰

With this Islamic revival, a more rigid religious discourse and/or Salafi religious discourse has become increasingly influential in Hui society. One of the factors in the increasing prominence of these discourses is the influence of clergy who have studied abroad.²¹ Salafi mosques have been established in some areas of Yunnan province over the last twenty years. These Salafi mosques intend to rigidify scriptural religious practice. Moreover, they reject the Sinicized Islamic practices that are shared amongst the majority of Hui Muslims. These popular religious groups are known as *Gedimu* sects and they engage in practices such as the distribution of money during funerals and so on. Salafi discourse is very powerful because it is seen to refer to orthodox Islam amongst Hui Muslims. Although there is no Salafi mosque in Kunming, Salafi

religious discourse has influenced the thought of Hui Muslims in Kunming where inter-sect contacts occur amongst those who are from various places. Therefore, rigid religious morals influenced by Salafi discourse have become a leading trend in debates surrounding the formation of religious norms and values in Kunming. Moreover, increased participation in the pilgrimage to Mecca mentioned above has promoted this conservative trend. Furthermore, access to religious knowledge has been facilitated through the spread of Islamic literature such as the translation of foreign Islamic thought (De Angelis 1997: 162) and Islamic websites.²²

Consequently, the proliferation of religious knowledge amongst ordinary Muslims, combined with the increase in daily contact with Han people, has resulted in the “objectification of Muslim consciousness” amongst part of Hui Muslim society (Eickelman and Piscatori 1996: 37-45). Such experience is referred to as *Renshi Anla* (recognize Allah) in my field site. The main criterion for being Muslim has become the strict practice of faith in Islam through objectification. In other words, ‘being Muslim’ has not been an inherent Hui attribute until recently. Therefore, Hui Muslims who recognize Allah do not regard Hanized Hui Muslims as Muslims.

Na Jun (a Hui male in his twenties) who works in a website design company in Kunming was raised in a secularized home. His parents and many of his relatives are unable to engage in basic Islamic practices such as prayer. However, he “recognized Allah” through contact with pious Hui Muslims, and started learning Islamic scriptures and practices by himself in literature and on websites. He often claimed that “[m]ost Hui Muslims in Kunming are not ‘Muslim’. They only avoid eating pork, (and engage in no other Islamic practices)”. Moreover, he described them with terms such as Hanized (*Hanhua*) and false (*Jiade*) Muslims. According to pious Hui Muslims like Na Jun, they are not able to worship correctly and know nearly nothing about Islam.

1.3. Fragmentation amongst Hui Muslims

As a result of the two contrary tendencies as stated above, Hui Muslims have become fragmented.²³ Specifically, while on the one hand many Hui Muslims have secularized like Wang Xuan, on the other hand, another part of Hui Muslim society has progressively Islamized such as Na Jun. Therefore, two key differences exist, separating the categories of secularized and Islamized groups. However, because, naturally, they all share the same popular ethnic category of being Hui people, there is a certain cultural commensurability or habitus of Islamic tradition amongst them.

Moreover, some of them are connected through other relationships such as kinship. It is not possible to simply or absolutely divide Hui Muslim society into homogeneous categories. Nevertheless, these two key differences do affect Kunming Hui Muslims in both their religious discourse and their social life as outlined in what follows.

Firstly, these two types, or groups, of Hui Muslim only loosely share the same sense of religion. For the Hanized Hui, religion is essentially a mental belief; in general they are not concerned about Islamic practices. For instance, although Wang Xuan abandoned Islamic practice due to her job, notwithstanding, she regards herself a Muslim. During an interview she claimed, “...though I don’t wear a headscarf now, the important thing is that religious belief is in my mind” (*Xinyang Zai Neixin*). However, the Islamized Hui Muslims such as Na Jun do not necessarily regard the Hui people like Wang Xuan as Muslim. Because for Islamized Hui Muslims, religion is an overarching life-style and one that very much governs everyday practice. In other words, being Muslim for them requires consistent religiosity. Therefore, many of them disdain Hanized Hui Muslims like Wang Xuan.

Secondly, there are basically no points of physical contact between these two types of Hui Muslims in the religious network centered around the existing government-authorized mosques. Islamized Hui Muslims are regularly in contact via mosques through Friday prayers or Islamic festivals. In other words, they form a religious network centered on mosque life. However, this network is not the same as the traditional Hui Muslim community. As stated above, because most Hui Muslims do not live around mosques, the present religious network is composed of pious Muslims who deliberately and regularly come to the mosque to participate in religious activities. Thus, secularized individuals are not part of this religious network as they rarely participate in mosque religious activities.

However, one key question I will attempt to address in my research is: does Islamic revival just bring about pietization of a part of Hui Muslims? Moreover, do Hui Muslims remain fragmented as seems to be the case? Not necessarily is the rather complex answer to both questions. I will now turn to one concrete example regarding partial association of Hui Muslims through an Internet community.

2. Partial association through the Hui Muslim Internet community

As mentioned above, traditional Hui Muslim communities were progressively dismantled after China's economic reform. Consequently, mosques were not regularly frequented by many secularized Hui Muslims in Kunming. Thus, it was difficult to gain access to Muslims beyond mosque clergy members and some pious Hui Muslims when I first started fieldwork. Given this situation, *halāl* restaurants were a valuable place to easily gain access to ordinary Hui Muslims. At times it seemed that the only specific places in which Hui people gathered, in addition to mosques, were *halāl* restaurants in the urban areas of Kunming. As far as I know, there is a poster advertising a Hui Muslim Internet community called The Kunming Hui People QQ Group (*Kunming Hui-zu QQ-qun*) in every *halāl* restaurant.²⁴ This poster makes this Internet community public in Hui Muslim society. This particular poster is composed of two parts: an advertisement designed to attract new members and an introduction to the activities of the community with the schedule of Islamic festivals and activities alongside a Western calendar.

This community was formed through a chat group of Kunming Hui Muslims and the Kunming Community BBS. Both were established in 2005. The Kunming Hui website was established five years later in 2010. The community had one thousand two hundred members in May 2011. Members exchange various types of information through this Internet community, as, for instance, religious activities, shops offering *halāl* foods, job opportunities, matchmaking events and so on. The participants mainly hold recreational activities, such as hiking, meeting for dinner, sports events and so on. Thus, members often meet one another through these activities in person so there is not much anonymity.²⁵ Therefore, this community is not a virtual form of Hui Muslim community spread throughout China, but in fact exists as a real or embodied Hui Muslim community localized in Kunming. Although mosques are obviously considered religious spaces, this online 'religious' community has come to play a kind of social role that leads fragmented Hui Muslims to associate in Kunming.

2.1. Associating through common interests

In the beginning, The Kunming Hui People QQ Group was mainly established and set up by a group of secularized Hui Muslims with the object of promoting solidarity among dispersed Hui people through recreational events such as dinner parties. In fact, many of their early activities were secular activities. Although numerous initial members of this Internet community were Hanized, it is through this mode of meeting

that pious Hui Muslims have also gradually come to participate in the activities of this virtual-cum-embodied community. The reason is that regardless of whether one is pious or not, all Hui people share common interests as a specific minority in an urban area. These common interests can be categorized into two types. One is rooted in the desire to have employment. As stated above, Hui people have to commit more and more to existing in a mainstream society that largely consists of a Han majority in the Post-Mao era. Given these conditions, job hunting has become a major problem for the Hui, because many companies shrink away from employing them due to their respect of Islamic commandments; such as the prohibition of eating pork and drinking alcohol, or the requirement to pray and fast, and where even wearing the headscarf can become an issue. Therefore, Wang Xuan, mentioned above, had to abandon Islamic practice when seeking employment. However, because it is extremely difficult for pious Hui Muslims to do this, they have to find a way to cope with both Islamic practice and the workplace. One solution is to work for a company managed by Hui people; the managers of Hui Muslims, regardless of whether they are pious or not, are generally tolerant of Islamic practices. Therefore, as stated below, pious Hui Muslims who participate in the activities of this Internet community in order to seek employment, remain dissatisfied with secularized Hui Muslims.

The third anniversary party of the Kunming Hui Muslim Internet Community was held in November 2008. This party took place in one of the largest and most ostentatious *halāl* restaurants in Kunming. Entertainment for the party was primarily composed of over ten shows put on by members. More than eight hundred Hui people attended this party and about one hundred of them participated directly in the shows. The performances had few overtly Islamic elements. Indeed, most of the performances had nothing to do with Islam at all. Moreover, most of the female performers not only did not wear headscarves, but also wore skirts and short-sleeved tops baring their arms and legs. However, this party was representative of other recreational activities arranged through this Internet community, and such wide-scale participation and questionable attire can be seen in other activities.

It was obvious that pious or Islamized Hui Muslims did not feel comfortable with this situation. Ma Min (a Hui female university student in her twenties), an informant, attended the party with me. She is a very pious Muslim who always wears a headscarf and does not miss daily prayers. She felt the behavior of the many non-pious Hui people was scandalous. She emphatically claimed, “[m]any of them (the members of this Internet community) can not worship. And furthermore, some of them even

drink and smoke. The only thing that is pious about them is that they do not eat pork”. Moreover, she constantly repeated in a sullen way, “I don’t like this type of gathering of Hui people, because they are all Hui people but they are not all Muslim”. Thus, she certainly held a critical view of The Kunming Hui People QQ Group. On the other hand, however, she also recognized the advantage of participating in this community. At one point, she said with a laugh, “...but there are good things in joining this group. It is possible to get to know various kinds of people, which is useful because they might serve us well in helping find a job”. This was a concern weighing on her as she was a university undergraduate at the time. The other pious Hui women who attended the party with her were also seeking employment.

Another common interest for the Hui minority is the search for marriage partners. Although marriage arranged by one’s parents is popular in rural areas where traditional Hui Muslim communities remain centered around mosque life, it is difficult to arrange marriage between Hui Muslims in the city of Kunming where the community has already been dismantled. Hui people are distributed around Kunming, and their lives are intertwined with those of Han people. Moreover, they do not necessarily have contact with Hui people in their everyday lives. This situation is applicable not only to secularized Hui Muslims, who basically do not join in mosque-based religious activities, but also pious Hui Muslims who regularly go to the mosque for religious activities. Religious places do not play the role of venue for male and female Hui Muslims to meet, in large part, because Friday prayer worship and Islamic festivals are only a duty for Muslim males. Hui youth basically lack opportunities to encounter members of the opposite sex in their daily lives. As a result, the search for a marriage partner has become another major problem, as well as employment, for most of the Hui Muslim youth of Kunming. Therefore, single youths in this Internet community regularly hold matchmaking activities (*Danshen Lianyi Huodong*) such as hiking, dinner parties and similar events. Ma Xian (a single Hui male in his twenties) is a middle school teacher and a pious Muslim who never misses Friday prayers. He told me during an activity, “it is too difficult to find a marriage partner for a Muslim in urban areas like Kunming. So these kinds of activities are necessary for us in order to meet”.

Moreover, this is a problem that extends beyond unmarried youth, because the elderly are concerned about the Hanization of Hui youth through the intermarriage of Hui people and Han people. About one and a half months after the party, Jin Shu (a Hui male in his sixties) who is a member of this Internet community and an officer of a mosque in Kunming, conveyed in a pleased tone, “I’m very happy, because I heard

some very good news recently. You know, they say that a couple has been formed by taking advantage of that party”. It shows how marriage is a big problem for all Hui Muslims regardless of their generation or dedication to religiosity in Kunming. So the first matchmaking party (*Xiangqin-hui*) was held by a Hui matchmaking company²⁶ and the youth of this Internet community in collaboration with the mosque clergy in a mosque restaurant.²⁷

In sum, these diverse Hui Muslims are mediated via their Internet community and they are often brought into association through the numerous common interests they share as a particular minority in an urban area. As noted above the website is beneficial for mutual needs such as job opportunities and marriage prospects. However this association is just partial and they remain fragmented as a community, because not only do they lack the same sense of religion, but beyond this, many pious Muslims regard secularized members with contempt. Therefore, the Hui Muslim Internet community is not rooted in cohesion and homogeneity, but is in fact heterogeneous in character both in religious and secular frames. Notwithstanding, this collective has come to play a role in Islamic revival.

2.2. Development of socially useful activities or *Waqf* activities

As stated above, the first activities promoted by this Hui Muslim Internet Community had few specifically Islamic characteristics. However, as Islamized Muslims came to participate in the activities, the online community gradually became tinged with religious sensibility. For example, as the circulation of religious information increased, pious Hui Muslims even came to depend on this community site for obtaining religious information. The following concrete example shows how the Internet is important as an agent of emerging Hui sociality. During fieldwork, I attended several Islamic ceremonies. Every time I went to the mosque to attend a ceremony, I noticed participation of at least two hundred Muslims. However, I was surprised when only about thirty men and women came to the mosque to participate in an important religious activity called The Day of Ashura (*Ashula-ri*) in December of 2009.²⁸ I wanted to know why there were so few participants compared with the high numbers I was accustomed to seeing. One of my informants named Ma Bin is a Hui male in his twenties. He is a pious Muslim and prays daily without fail, he is also one of the members of the Hui Muslim Internet community. He explained the reason for the poor turnout was that: “nobody was notified about the Day of Ashura via the Internet, so few people came today. But I assure you if the ceremony was posted on the Internet, like it usually is, then many more people would probably have come”.

The Hui Muslim Internet community has come to play not only a role of mediation of religious information, but also an actual role in some of the religious activities. One of these is to assist in the celebration of *Mawlid* or Birth of the Prophet (*Shengdan-jie*). This Islamic festival is the largest of all the Islamic festivals in Kunming. However, only a few Muslims come to the mosque to attend the overtly religious ritual during the festival. The participants do not necessarily need to perform any religious activity in this festival. Therefore, many Hui Muslims come to the mosque just for the meal offered by the mosque.²⁹ Nevertheless, clergymen and some non-ordained Muslims recite passages from the Qur'an and clergymen read sermons. This is unlike other festivals such as *Eid ul-Fitr*, the holiday marking the end of Ramadan (*Kaizhai-jie*), whereby Muslims must go to the mosque in order to pray.³⁰ The fact that *Mawlid* is the largest festival and does not require participants to attend religious activities reflects the progressive secularization of many Hui Muslims. More to the point, a great deal of help is needed in order to provide a large number of diners with a meal and the members of the Hui Muslim Internet community often play this role. Without them, it would be impossible to hold the festival nowadays; for example, nearly one hundred volunteers composed of Internet community members and university students assisted in serving during the festival at a mosque in 2009.³¹

The main reason why the Internet community plays a role in this religious event is due to the admission of some Islamized Hui Muslims, especially Ma Qing who worked for an NGO on an earlier occasion. Thus, some new members had previous experience with volunteering and this ethos was introduced to the community, especially notable, as such programs began in 2007 when she and many other pious Muslims joined. For example, in addition to the activities mentioned above, various new activities such as the offering of financial support to *Dakwah* movements from Hui Muslim university students, offering aid and support to Hui living in deprived areas, helping out elderly Muslims in need, holding matchmaking parties as mentioned above, and even engaging in reforestation work on a mountain with a Muslim graveyard in Kunming are some of the events started by these members.

These activities are called 'socially useful activities' (*Gongyi Huodong*) by the members. The human and financial resources for these activities come from the Hui Muslim Internet community and are collected on the community website. However, it is clear that these philanthropic efforts are regarded by Ma Qing and the other pious Muslims as part of the propagation of the Islamic faith or viewed as a kind of Islamic revival movement. For example, Ma Qing confided; "Many Hui people don't know

what Islam is, because they have never received (religious) education. So I want to encourage the development of Islam and Muslim society through education and culture”. Thus, Ma Qing aims to assist in the development of Muslim society and Islam through the furtherance of Islamic faith. These kinds of religious activities developed into a movement to establish an NGO. Their plan is to form an NGO that essentially functions like a *Waqf*.³² The *raison d’être* of this movement can be traced back to a shared view that mosques which almost monopolize acceptance of *Zakāt* (mandatory charity) do not aptly function as an institution of religious redistribution. Because mosque religious activities are restricted by government, they cannot always effectively answer the needs of ordinary people. In fact, mosques are often criticized by ordinary Muslims who commonly say such things as “only mosques become richer and richer”. Therefore, their goal was to widen the scale of activities to suit common people’s needs and help to provide a stable revenue source for their activities through transforming this Internet community into ‘an acquirer institute’ of *Zakāt* functioning as *Waqf*. Although this attempt to organize *Waqf* activities somewhat met with failure in terms of religious conversion, the activities were largely successful and are still ongoing.³³

On the other hand, secularized Hui Muslims who participate in or financially support these activities do not necessarily share the vision of more pious members like Ma Qing. For instance, many of them explain their motivation for the activities as just “to do volunteer work” simply in and for itself without religious significance. Alternatively, for them, the significance of the activities for the well-being and solidarity of the ethnic group is often emphasized. For example, Ma Hai (a Hui male in his thirties) told me in a simple and straightforward manner that “...it is good that Hui people help each other” in relation to the group’s work in consoling people at a nursing home for the elderly located in a mosque. These Hui Muslims are not necessarily pious. Indeed, many hardly engage in Islamic practices such as prayer or wearing the headscarf even during such activities. A prime example of this was when, despite it being prayer time and despite the fact that they were in a mosque, Ma Hai and the other participants did not go to worship. Again, Islamized Hui Muslims have a tendency to negatively evaluate impious or secularized Hui Muslims and are unwilling to cooperate with them. However, Islamized Hui Muslims need to involve secularized Hui Muslims in their religiously oriented activities in order just to maintain or extend them; ironically, without their secular help, there would be few religious events. Some pious members are well aware of this dynamic, noted for example when Ma Li (a Hui female in her thirties) who is a friend of Ma Qing admonished members who were dissatisfied by the cooperation offered by secularized Hui Muslims. When the members who lead

Waqf activities held a meeting for their action plan in December 2009 she said “we should not belittle the members of the QQ group (the Kunming Hui Muslim Internet Community) because they are not Muslim. Their influence is getting more and more powerful (among the Hui Muslim society in Kunming)”.

Thus, useful social activities or *Waqf* activities have arisen within the Hui Muslim Internet Community. Moreover, though this online community just carried out secular activities to begin with, the community has come to play a significant role in religion, even earning some reluctant recognition from Islamized Muslims like Ma Qing. It should be highlighted here, however, that the admission of pious Muslims into the community did not bring about Islamization among the members, but pious Muslims and Hanized Muslims did in fact become partially associated through their participation in this online community. Moreover, the perspectives of both Hui groups, secularized and Islamized, participating in the Internet community, virtually or in the flesh, remains different. In other words, on the one hand, for secularized Hui Muslims, the *Waqf* activities are basically philanthropic activities for the mutual aid of Hui Muslims. On the other hand, from the perspective of Islamized Hui Muslims, these activities are rooted in Islamic revival movements directed towards the development and promotion of Islam; in short, they regard all these activities as part of missionary work. The central point underscored by these ethnographic cases is that the Hui people associated via this internet community do not necessarily have the same intention when engaging in the same activities within the community.

Conclusion: Entanglements of the Islamic and the secular

The traditional mosque-centric social structure in Hui Muslim society has been dismantled to a great extent through economic reform in China. As such, there has been an expansion of Hui people’s commitment to mainstream society centered on the dominant Han people. This social change influenced many Hui in becoming Hanized. Consequently, the change brought about secularization among Hui Muslims. On the other hand, rigid Islamic discourse like Salafi religious discourse has come to have progressively more impact on Hui Muslim society through the influence of clergy who studied abroad and the proliferation of religious media such as Islamic literature and Islamic websites. This has led to a rise in rigid or conservative religious discourse brought about via the Islamization or pietization of part of Hui Muslim society. These contrary tendencies have fostered fragmentation amongst Hui Muslims not only on religious discourse but also in their everyday lives.

The Hui Muslim Internet community has started to draw both factions of Hui Muslims into association. It is a virtual space in which real meetings are spurred on by their partially shared needs and demands as an ethnic and religious minority living in an urban area. I have proposed some concrete examples of such needs as employment opportunities and marriage prospects. Thus this online community associates these two groups of Hui Muslims, even though they remain fragmented, who share certain interests as a minority while differing in terms of sense of religiosity and lifestyle as Muslim. In fact, Islamized Hui Muslims clearly do not feel comfortable about secularized Hui Muslims. Thus, their association via the Internet community is partial and forms a 'fragmented collective'. The Hui Muslim Internet community shows an uncomfortable and contested sociality of Hui people; a sociality that entangles both Islamic and secular elements. This online community is not a substitute for the traditional Hui Muslim community that was dismantled through social change in the post-Mao era. Instead it is a new or novel network loosely bridging the Hui Muslim community divides of the religious and the secular. Hence, the Internet not only affects religion, bringing about Islamization or pietization through the facilitation of access to religious knowledge as previous literatures have argued, but also has a tangible effect on society causing each sphere of Hui life to participate in or extend into the other.

Islamic revival movements such as *Waqf* activities have arisen from such Islamic and secular entanglements. That is to say, Islamic revival movements cannot, and should not, be reduced to a rising or even a shared sense of religiosity as previous literatures have interpreted. Islamic revival movements progress because of partial associations between the secular and the religious rather than because of increased Islamization or pietization of Muslims in the dominant secular world. Moreover, Islam, revived in this context, is not necessarily doctrinal or scriptural Islam but Islam in the public sense (Salvatore and Eickelman 2006). As stated above, Islamic revival has progressed through 'useful social activities' implicated in both philanthropic and religious purposes. In other words, Islam entangles the various intentions of diverse Muslims including secularized Muslims and so it is evident that *Waqf* activities can involve actors across the religious and the secular divide.

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¹ Islamic clergymen are called *Ahong* in Chinese. The etymology of *Ahong* comes from the Persian word *ākhund* which means a scholar or a teacher. *Ahong* are individuals who have a government-issued license to preach Islamic education in officially authorized mosques or Islamic schools. Such an education takes about four years for accreditation in Yunnan province.

² However, religious embodied knowledge is missing in this new form of connectivity. For example, *Qinggan Jinbai* (affective worship) is valued amongst Hui Muslims in my field site. Affective worship is thought to be cultivated not through studying the teachings of Islam accessible through this new form of connectivity but through collective prayer such as Friday prayers.

³ The Islamic clergy also have access to the Internet. But it seems that the influence of the Internet is stronger amongst ordinary Muslims, at least in my field site.

⁴ For example, Hirschkind (2001) argued that listening to a sermon on cassette plays an important role for ethical self-improvement in Egypt.

⁵ Eickelman (1992) argued that the spread of mass education de-monopolized access to religious texts which had, until then, been monopolized by *ulama*.

⁶ Engelke (2010) reviewed such recent developments in religion in his "Religion and the media turn".

⁷ For an example relating to Chinese Muslims see Gillette (2000) who argued that Islamization (or Arabization) is coincident with modernization.

⁸ The concept of the clash of civilizations popularized by Huntington (1996) is representative. Secularization theory also includes a similar view on religion; that it is incompatible with modernity. In other words, secularization theory contends that religion is by necessity in decline in the modern world (Pollack 2008).

⁹ Bayat (2005) addressed each perspective as anti-modern and postmodern. Soares and Osella (2009) reviewed the broad changes in the theoretical framework of Islamic studies, especially focusing on anthropological debates about the relationship between Islam and politics.

¹⁰ The Hui are one of the ethnic Muslim minorities in China. Almost all Hui people are Muslim.

¹¹ I conducted fieldwork working in Mandarin and in Yunnan dialects of Chinese.

¹² All of the Hui people that are referenced in this paper are self-proclaimed Muslims. Therefore I do not distinguish between Hui people and Hui Muslims which is important to note for the sake of clarity.

¹³ In general, it is *da fen san, xiao ji zhong* (大分散、小集中).

¹⁴ For example, Bloomhall, who carried out missionary work with Chinese Muslims in the late period of the Qing Dynasty in China, recorded that they merely formally kotosed to the idol of the emperor (Bloomhall 1910: 228).

¹⁵ Muslims were prohibited from religious activities, such as prayers and Islamic festivals (*Eid*), and mosques were confiscated in Kunming by the government in this period (Kunming-shi Zongjiao Shiwu-ju and Kunming-shi Yisilan-jiao Xiehui 2005: 129-135).

¹⁶ This tendency continues today. For example, the largest Muslim area in Kunming was also destroyed through urban development in 2009.

¹⁷ It has been argued in Hui Muslim studies that Hanization brings about a dilution of the sense of religiosity or Muslim identity. In this sense, Hanization leads to secularization (Pollack 2008: 2-4).

¹⁸ For example, religious activities are only permitted in authorized religious institutes called *Zongjiao Huodong Changsuo* (Ashiwa and Wank 2009: 11).

¹⁹ However, religious policies have been tightened since the late 1990s because of the influence of the Tiananmen Square Incident (Sawai 2010: 72-74).

²⁰ I obtained this statistic from a mosque during fieldwork.

²¹ Salafi (*Salafei* in Chinese) is called *Santai* (raising three times) by *Gedimu*. *Santai* is derived from the difference in the method of prayer between Salafi and *Gedimu*. While Salafi members raise their hands three times in prayer, *Gedimu* members raise their hands only once. The *Gedimu* method originated from Hanafi.

²² Islamic websites have successively been established especially since the year 2000. Among the many websites my informants often use are: *Zhong Mu Wang* [Chinese Muslim Website] (www.2muslim.com/), *Yisilan zhi Guang* [The Light of Islam] (www.norislam.com/), *Yisilan zhi Chuang* [The Window of Islam] (www.yslzc.com/). The oldest is *Yisilan zhi Guang*. It has been online since 1999.

- ²³ Hui people were fragmented much earlier. The category of Hui people as one nationality (*minzu*) was politically created by the CCP in the 1930s. The CCP was struggling for supremacy with the Guomindang (Chinese Nationalist Party), the Japanese army and the military clique of the Hui people (they were not regarded as a nationality by the Guomindang government) at that time. Additionally, the CCP admitted the right to national self-determination for each nationality. In this situation, the CCP tried to gain support from the Chinese Muslim people by authorizing them as a nationality. As a result, the Hui people became a nationality after 1949 (Matsumoto 1999: 171-239). However, the question of whether the Hui people were indeed a nationality had been discussed before the Hui people became a nationality through this sequence of events, because they can be distinguished from Han people only in religious belief (Kimura 2009). In fact, Gladney who carried out fieldwork in four regions of China revealed the socio-cultural diversity among the Hui people in each region (Gladney 1996).
- ²⁴ QQ is an abbreviation of Tencent QQ. This is the most popular free instant messaging software across China.
- ²⁵ Moreover the use of QQ requires mutual recognition between members and in my field site, members' numbers are exchanged like mobile phone numbers in Japan.
- ²⁶ This company was established by Ma Qing (a Hui female entrepreneur in her thirties) and some members of the Internet community in 2009. Thereafter the company has regularly held matchmaking parties in mosques or *halāl* restaurants.
- ²⁷ Five of six mosques in the Kunming urban area have *halāl* restaurants inside the mosque. This is because Muslims have a meal during Islamic festivals or during Ramadan (*Zhaiyue*). In addition to this, such restaurants are a source of income for the mosques. Each mosque rents facilities to merchants providing a source of income since the 1990s.
- ²⁸ The Day of Ashura is composed of the following activities: first, clergymen and ordinary Muslims who can read the Qur'an recite passages from the Qur'an together before *Isha*' prayer or night prayer (*Xiaoli* or *Huofutan*). The text is divided into thirty volumes (*Kaijing*); second, they sing "A song of praise to Muhammad" (*Zansheng*); third, clergymen preach a sermon in relation to that day; fourth, all the participants carry out *Isha* prayer. They successively do *Nafl* prayer or an optional prayer (*Fugongbai*) of twelve *Rak'a* (units of movement during the Muslim prayer) after the initial prayer. Fifth, they do *Witr* prayer (*Weiteer*), and then offer up *Du'a* or a prayer of supplication (*Dua*). Finally, they partake of rice gruel together, which is offered by the mosque.
- ²⁹ However this meal is not free. One needs to buy a meal ticket (about ten Chinese Yuan).
- ³⁰ There were just five or six hundred participants of *Eid ul-Fitr* at the same mosque in 2009.
- ³¹ Although about ten years ago every mosque had boarders with the aim of becoming clergymen, and moreover they had played the role in Kunming, through government direction, only one mosque per sect has boarders now. Therefore the other mosques have to depend on volunteers such as members of the online community in order to hold festivals.
- ³² A *Waqf* is essentially an operating system for an Islamic endowment utilized for religious or charitable purposes (Hoexter 2002). However my informants basically do not use the term: *Waqf*. Nevertheless, their activities can be seen as a kind of *Waqf*. For example, they explained that the NGO functions as a group that especially collects and distributes *Tian Ke* (*Zakāt*, mandatory charity) in Islamic states. Therefore, I provisionally use this term in this paper.
- ³³ Intervention by public security forces caused the failure of the organization of *Waqf* activities. It is said amongst ordinary Hui Muslims that clergymen who feared their concessions of *Zakāt* were threatened had lodged a complaint with the public security forces.

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